March 13, 2016

To: gaetestimony@cga.ct.gov

Subject: GAE Committee Testimony on H.B. 5619 and S.J. 36 3/14

Copy: Representatives John Scott and Aundre Bumgardner

<u>S.J. 36</u>

Dear GAE Committee:

Thanks for holding a public hearing on this important issue. I strongly support S.J.36.

As you know, our State parks are a treasure enjoyed by all. Bluff Point alone has about 400,000 visitors per year. We ask that a Constitutional Amendment be considered to better protect our public lands.

Legislative conveyances of public lands have several damaging impacts including fragmentation and loss of state holdings that are ecologically valuable, important for healthful outdoor recreation, and necessary for viable farming. I have personally seen landowners dissuaded from giving property to the state even if their donation contains a deed restriction. Once again it also wastes state and private resources researching and fighting potential losses. Finally it breaks faith with our predecessors who worked hard to preserve these lands, and with future generations who deserve such special places in an increasingly urbanized future.

Regarding S.J. 36, it can be can be improved in several ways. Specifically, if a sale, transfer, or change of use for public land is proposed, then: 1) Expenses associated with holding a public hearing should be borne by the proposed new landholder and not by the state agency currently holding the land in question; 2) Expenses associated with determining fair market value (e.g., conducting appraisals) should be borne by the proposed new landholder and not by the state agency currently holding the land in question; 3) The ultimate approval of fair market value should be made by the state agency holding the land in question; and 4) Minor administrative boundary adjustments that do not diminish the conservation, open space, recreation, or agricultural purposes of the land should be exempted.

Thank you again for holding a public hearing.

Best regards,

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